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TAGS: PREL SOCI PHUM SCUL PL VT

SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: DISCUSSING FATHER RYDZYK

REF: STATE 100294

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CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, DCM, EXEC, State.

REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Department's Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues met key officials from the Holy See and the Redemptorist order to discuss the case of Radio Maryja and the impact of Father Rydzyk's anti-Semitic remarks on Polish restitution efforts. Church officials spoke cautiously but took careful note of the information and the level of USG concern. The Holy See predicted that Polish bishops would address the matter seriously at their next plenary in October, and the head of Rydzyk's order made clear his readiness to act firmly if/if adequate evidence can be provided to substantiate charges against Rydzyk. Embassy Vatican hopes such evidence can be provided by Department and Embassy Warsaw. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador J. Christian Kennedy, the Department's Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, met Holy See and Redemptorist officials in Rome September 18-19 to discuss the USG's policy of supporting the new European democracies' efforts to provide restitution of, or pay partial compensation for, properties stolen from victims of the Nazis and Communists. He also talked about the overall mission of his office, anti-Semitism, and especially the case of Radio Maryja and Father Rydzyk in Poland. Kennedy, accompanied by DCM, met Father Joseph William Tobin, the Superior General of the Redemptorist Order; Bishop Brian Farrell, Vice President of the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews; Cardinal Zenon Grochlewski, Prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education; and Monsignor Pietro Parolin, Undersecretary for Relations with States (equivalent to deputy foreign minister).

Redemptorists

¶3. (C) Ambassador Kennedy provided a detailed explanation of his mission, emphasizing the importance of giving a measure of justice through restitution and compensation to Holocaust survivors, victims' heirs, and others who suffered horribly in WWII. Getting into greater detail, Kennedy raised the obstacles created by the anti-Semitic comments of Father Rydzyk made on Radio Maryja and other media in Poland, especially those cited in a July edition of the Polish news magazine "Wprost". Kennedy emphasized that we see two intertwined problems with Radio Maryja, Rydzyk, and the statements attributed to both and never denied. First, the anti-Semitic tendencies in Radio Maryja programming are unacceptable. Second, remarks like those asserted -- and never disavowed by Rydzyk -- in the "Wprost" article impede justice for victims by inflaming the political environment in Poland.

¶4. (C) Father Tobin, an American with long experience, briefly

explained his position. The Redemptorist order, founded in 1732, was for most of its history very centralized (like the Jesuits). After 1969, however, the influence of Vatican II led to changes, and now the Redemptorists are very de-centralized, so that local provinces retain considerable autonomy. Tobin can and does intervene directly on issues when appropriate, but must act with great care and deliberation. Tobin said that the Rydzyk case is a neuralgic one, and Polish bishops have often raised it with him -- both opponents and supporters. Tobin met with the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See on this issue in 2006 and asked him to provide evidence (such as transcripts) to document the charge of anti-Semitism. To date he has not received this evidence. The problem, said Tobin, is that Rydzyk speaks in code, so that listeners understand him perfectly well without him actually using incriminating language. Tobin said he had also written to Rabbi Rosen in Jerusalem, and has spoken to American Jewish groups about Rydzyk. Tobin said he would be sending two assistants to Poland the week of September 24 to follow up on the matter.

¶15. (C) Tobin called Rydzyk to Rome in July of this year, along with his provincial supervisor, and asked him directly about the reported anti-Semitic comments. Rydzyk denied making any such statements "three times", said Tobin, who noted that the Polish Redemptorists are very defensive now.

¶16. (C) Kennedy said in conclusion that the USG takes the position that anti-Semitic comments like those attributed to Rydzyk and other Radio Maryja personalities are unacceptable and unworthy of figures of great public influence, and especially organizations that are part of the Roman Catholic Church. He also noted that there is a terrible contradiction between a Polish radio station associated with the Roman Catholic Church broadcasting virulently anti-Semitic material and the enormous body of work undertaken by the late Pope John Paul II to create an amicable, new Jewish-Catholic relationship. The USG believes Rydzyk and Radio Maryja should stop making anti-Semitic statements and impeding Polish efforts to provide a measure of justice through compensation. He added that his office would see if it could provide some direct evidence to substantiate further what we believe are remarks made by Rydzyk or others in

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the Radio Maryja media group that includes Nasz Dziennik and TV Trwam.

¶17. (C) Tobin said he was very grateful for the explanations about USG policy in support of compensation and restitution and that he recognized how the issue of fundamental justice was involved in the question of Radio Maryja and remarks attributed to Rydzyk. Emphasizing the importance of providing at least a measure of justice for Holocaust victims and survivors, he expressed interest in staying in touch on these issues.

¶18. (C) Note: In an aside, Tobin acknowledged that he was very unhappy at the August photo of Rydzyk with Pope Benedict XVI, and that "the Pope knows I want to see him about this". While he declined to elaborate, it seems clear that the photo was arranged without Tobin's knowledge or permission, and he implied that the Vatican had served the Pope poorly in permitting this photo to occur.

Holy See

¶19. (C) The meeting with Bishop Farrell was brief due to scheduling constraints, but nevertheless valuable. Farrell said European Jewish groups largely follow the lead of their American and Israeli counterparts, and that the "European" Jewish voice, such as it is, remains muted. The Holy See's dialogue with Jews, which began over 40 years ago, only began to become truly productive in the past few years, as centuries of mistrust began to be overcome. Jews today fear the new challenge of Islam, as do we, said Farrell. He emphasized the overriding importance to the Church of the threat to Christians in the Holy Land, noting

that unfortunately there has been little progress to date on this matter in talks with Israel. Farrell said that many Israeli Jews are not very familiar with Christianity, while international Jewish organizations are both familiar and sensitive, but haven't been able to produce results in Israel. The "new anti-Semitism" appearing in Europe today is unlike the "old" antisemitism in that it doesn't arise from opposition to Judaism so much as from the phenomenon of marginalized and radicalized groups in Europe.

¶10. (C) The meeting with Monsignor Parolin was also productive. Parolin noted that the Holy See had its own problems with restitution of property following the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, and it remains an unresolved issue today. For example, the Czech restitution law for Jews has been successful, but the Church still needs help. Kennedy reviewed the status of restitution legislation and implementation in various countries; coming to Poland, he emphasized that while communal property law implementation was slower than desirable, there is some activity on this front. Restitution of private property has now become the critical issue. USG policy is to encourage restitution first, and only then compensation, though we recognize that with the passage of time restitution becomes increasingly complicated. We also urge that there be a single law for all claimants. Kennedy noted that the Polish government has estimated a total cost for private property settlement of 6-8 billion USD (Warsaw would require separate legislation whose implementation would cost 2-4 billion USD, according to GOP figures shared with us). While some of this would go to expatriates, the same GOP sources estimate that most of the money would remain in Poland and would probably benefit the Polish economy. Parolin, observing that he would be in Poland on or about October 13, said the Holy See agreed that restitution/compensation constitutes justice.

¶11. (C) Kennedy then raised the specific problem of Radio Maryja and Father Rydzyk, which has upset many Americans. Rydzyk's anti-Semitism is unworthy of the Church. He has never publicly denied making the remarks he is accused of, leading the public to believe that the charges are accurate. Rydzyk's influence (especially his wildly inflated estimate of the costs, eightfold greater than the GOP's) further weakens the possibilities for restitution in Poland. Kennedy recognized that Radio Maryja provides many valuable services (such as broadcasting the Mass to shut-ins) but emphasized that the USG believes this anti-Semitic rhetoric should stop. Kennedy emphasized also that the issue of giving Holocaust survivors a measure of justice in their lifetime would also have a fundamentally moral character. Parolin agreed that the aspect of justice was an important consideration. Parolin also noted that Cardinal Bertone (the Holy See Secretary of State, second only to the Pope) was in Poland recently and had said that Radio Maryja is an internal Polish matter, and that the Holy See cannot intervene directly. Parolin added that the president of the Polish Bishops Conference, Archbishop Michalik, had said that Catholic radio ought not to broadcast such remarks. Kennedy replied that shortly after saying this, Michalik had publicly praised Radio Maryja -- thus sending a mixed message. It would be helpful, said Kennedy, if Michalik could emphasize instead the positive

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work of the Church toward relations with Jews, building on the excellent foundational work done by Pope John Paul II and continued by Pope Benedict XVI.

¶12. (C) Parolin, expressing a degree of confidence, said that Polish bishops understand some things need to be fixed. Citing Michalik again, Parolin predicted that Polish bishops would address the Rydzyk matter at their next plenary in October. He also noted the existence of a group established for the pastoral care of Radio Maryja. Later in the conversation Kennedy pressed Parolin again on how sure he was that the Polish bishops would address the Rydzyk issue at their next meeting. Parolin repeated that he felt reasonably sure the Polish episcopate would address it.

¶13. (C) Unlike the other Holy See interlocutors, Cardinal Grocholowski -- while pleased to be consulted -- declined to engage seriously on the issue of Radio Marjya and anti-Semitism in Poland, instead taking refuge behind the argument that this did not fall into his area of responsibility.

Comment

¶14. (C) Ambassador Kennedy's visit (and his detailed presentation) succeeded in raising Holy See awareness of both the Rydzyk problem and the degree to which the United States is concerned about it. While our interlocutors were certainly aware of the controversy beforehand, most had not felt directly involved, considering it more of a Polish matter. This attitude persists, but the pace of the Holy See's slow machinery should now move up a notch. Parolin in particular, despite his typically cautious phrasing, will ensure that Vatican foreign policy takes greater account of Radio Maryja's international profile.

¶15. (C) Most valuable was the meeting with Father Tobin, who also has the most immediate potential to address the problem. He came across as a practical and responsible man who is willing to take the necessary steps to rein in Rydzyk -- if he can be persuaded that a clear-cut case exists. To that end we hope that Embassy Warsaw and the Department can provide more concrete evidence of inflammatory statements by Radio Maryja and/or Father Rydzyk, which Embassy Vatican is prepared to raise promptly with Tobin.

¶16. (U) Ambassador Kennedy has cleared this message.
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